

Freedom WatchTM



Citizens Project

Controversies With District 20's New Charter School

The Classical Academy is a proposed charter school for grades K-6 in Academy School District 20, in the northern part of Colorado Springs. In October, the Academy submitted its 500 page application to District 20 to be allowed to open with funds from, and as part of, School District 20. The Classical Academy proposes a number of missions, ranging from rigorous learning standards and analytical learning skills to learning Spanish and Latin.

The Classical Academy plans to use E.D. Hirsch, Jr.'s Core Knowledge curriculum. This curriculum teaches specific knowledge and provides students with "a common ground for communication in a diverse society." This traditional curriculum is enjoying a resurgence in American education.

The Classical Academy would draw students from District 20 and, assuming

space is available, from outside the District as well.

The charter school held its required public meeting

November

14 in conjunction

with the

Board of

School District

20. Its

application

was then considered by the D-

20 School Board in a long and

sometimes contentious meeting

The school organizers said they didn't realize the Bible curriculum was even in their application.

charter school will be "to instill virtuous character in students through teaching about morality through examples in literature and history, as well as by positive application and modeling of the virtues." To

accomplish this, the school will teach students about "the character traits and qualities that have traditionally been valued by society" and "historical and mythical figures who embody various character traits."

The school will also teach "the impact of moral failure on society, such as the effects of crime, lying, cheating, etc."

Teaching about the Bible

While The Classical Academy promises "we will not promote any particular religion," its application to the D-20 School Board contained a "Special Bible Knowledge" section with suggested Bible stories and verses to be taught in each grade. The purpose was to teach students about the Bible.

The section quotes Core Knowledge founder E.D. Hirsch, Jr.: "No one in the English-speaking world can be considered literate without a basic knowledge of the Bible. ... The Bible is essential for understanding many of the moral and spiritual values of our culture, whatever our religious beliefs. ... Our knowledge of Judaism and Christianity needs to be more detailed than that of other great religions, if only because of the historical accident that

We Did It!

It was an uphill battle from the start. The first poll estimated that 76 percent planned to vote "yes" on Amendment 17, the Parental Rights Amendment. In addition, nearly \$400,000 poured in from a Virginia right-wing group to fund the Amendment 17 campaign.

Despite the odds, grassroots groups throughout the state started to alert voters about this amendment. They included nurses, doctors, teachers, librarians, child advocates and - most importantly - parents. Eventually, 160 groups came out in opposition to Amendment 17.

We saw it coming

Here at Citizens Project, we took note in September 1995 when Christian Coalition started promoting parental rights laws. We tracked it in Colorado over the months. You read about it first in our May 1996 *Freedom Watch*.

In early July, Citizens Project started the ball rolling by calling to see if there was interest in forming a local group against Amendment 17. We found a lot of interest.

We helped form the Pikes Peak Protect Our Children

Coalition, which soon had over 100 people. When this Coalition held its press conference, that pushed the Parental Rights Amendment to the forefront of local news.

Coalition members never stopped working. They made over 2,000 calls, held a rally, distributed thousands of flyers, and (most importantly) spoke with friends, family and strangers about the problems that Amendment 17 would bring.

We were successful

It worked. On November 5, Amendment 17 was defeated by a 15% margin. Grassroots efforts had moved the polls 32 percentage points!

The real election day surprise, however, was here in El Paso County, where the "yes" side prevailed by only 800 votes. In a county that passed Amendment 2 by a two to one margin, our Coalition's efforts resulted in a mere one percent difference, a victory in its own right.

Thanks and congratulations to the Pikes Peak Protect Our Children Coalition and to everyone else who worked so hard. We did it!

The Classical Academy has noble goals and fills a definite need for a more traditional curriculum in Colorado Springs.

District 20 and the State Board of Education, The Classical Academy hopes to open its doors in Colorado Springs in September 1997.

Teaching virtue

One of the missions of this

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Continued on page 2

District 20, Continued

has embedded the Bible in our thought and language. ... The Bible is a central book in our culture."

This special Bible section was intended to augment the standard Hirsch curriculum that integrated information about the religions of Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism.

The controversy

The special Bible section noted that "the Biblical topics suggested are not an integral part of the *Sequence* because in many schools the 'separation between church and state' is a potentially tense issue."

Given the scrutiny of church-state issues by many groups here in Colorado Springs, there was surprise that the charter school organizers would include special Bible studies in their proposed curriculum.

There was more surprise when the charter school's recruiting brochure promised that the school would teach biblical creationism

"side by side" with evolution.

Linda Page, proposed Principal of the Academy, was contacted by Citizens Project before the November 21 School Board meeting for clarification of this and other issues, but she declined to be return these phone calls. Linda Page is the former Principal of District 12's Cheyenne Mountain Charter Academy in Colorado Springs, and former Education Policy Manager at Focus on the Family.

The Board meeting

The special Bible curriculum and creationism issues were raised by the D-20 Board and by Citizens Project at the November 21 School Board meeting. The charter school organizers agreed to make changes.

With regard to the special Bible curriculum, the charter school organizers stated that they had not realized that this special curriculum section was even in their application and that it would be removed. On the issue of teaching biblical creationism, they said that

the reference to it in their brochure had been misunderstood, as the brochure had not

specified that this "side by side" would be in the school's science classes. The school organizers agreed it was uncon-

stitutional to teach religious creationism in science classes and said they never had intended to teach biblical creationism "side by side" in the science classes.

To give them the benefit of any doubt, it's certainly possible that the charter school organizers had not read through their proposed curriculum before they included it in their application to the D-20 School Board. And when their brochure promised creationism "side by side" with evolution, perhaps the school organizers believed everyone knew the state of the law and would understand that this would

The school's brochure promised that the school would teach creationism "side by side" with evolution.

not apply to science classes.

Regardless, the D-20 School Board required that these be changed, and the charter school organizers readily agreed to do so. Indeed, they had submitted an amendment to their application to eliminate the creationism in science class issue just prior to the Board meeting.

Controversial topics

Not all matters were finalized at the November 21 Board meeting. District 20 has a "controversial subjects" policy, and the charter school does not want to be bound by it.

School District 20 has a strong policy on teaching

controversial subjects. Among other points, that policy requires that "students ... have the right and responsibility to study all sides of an issue," "facts and opinions repre-

senting various viewpoints must be adequately and fairly presented," and "teachers do not have the right to indoctrinate students to their own viewpoint." That policy has proved successful in the

District's schools.

The Classical Academy wants to waive this policy. Rather than comply with the District's policy on controversial issues, the Academy's application suggests that it will deal with all complaints without a written policy.

Under the Classical Academy's "Resolving Conflicts About Controversial Materials" section, parents with concerns will be required to submit them to a Parental Complaint Committee, which will resolve the complaint "in the context of the school's philosophy, mission, and charter, as well as our conflict resolution policy." Any unresolved complaints will be dealt with by the school's Principal.

Some in District 20 are concerned that failure to have a firm and fair controversial subjects policy in place will encourage active parents and school administrators, if they desire, to promote and protect a religious orthodoxy in the school. In that worse case scenario, protesting parents would be subject to the unrestrained whims of the Parent's Complaint Committee or the school's Principal.

The matter of the controversial subjects policy is likely to be resolved on an interim basis at the Board meeting on December 5. The Board will likely require that The Classical Academy

be bound by the District's controversial subjects policy until such time as the charter school proposes a more acceptable policy to the D-20 Board.

The bottom line

Should we be concerned if a public charter school promotes a particular faith in policy or practice? Citizens Project thought so, and brought the Bible study and creationism issues to the attention of the D-20 School Board on November 21. The D-20 Board and the charter school resolved these issues appropriately.

The Classical Academy has noble goals and fills a definite need for a more traditional curriculum in Colorado Springs. The actions by the District 20 School Board in its November meeting will help keep The Classical Academy a steady beacon of learning, rather than a whirlwind of religious controversy.

If the Academy were allowed to operate unrestrained by reasonable policies that promote fairness, intellectual freedom and religious liberty for all students, it could inadvertently stray beyond the bounds of a public school's mission. This would be an embarrassment to our city and a potential liability to School District 20. CP

Teaching the Bible

A number of attempts have been made to "teach the Bible in school" as a way to circumvent constitutional prohibitions against promoting religion in public schools. Some have advocated teaching the Bible as literature; others have wanted to teach history classes using the Bible. Generally, they have been unsuccessful.

The Hirsch approach

District 20's proposed Classical Academy, through E.D. Hirsch's Core Knowledge curriculum, had included a specific plan to "teach about the Bible" each year to elementary school students, ages six through twelve. This Bible curriculum would have taught students an increasing number of Bible verses, Bible stories, and biblical beliefs as they advanced grade by grade.

When challenged about this special Bible curriculum at the District 20 School Board meeting in November, the charter school organizers agreed to remove it.

But why are some people here in Colorado Springs so interested in teaching the Bible in a public school?

Christian values

Some people simply believe that public schools should teach more Christianity. They often agree with Focus on the Family's 1993 *Community Impact Curriculum*, which stated that "current expressions of human dignity, morality and social order are possible only because of our Christian heritage."

These are the people that Alan Crippen, a senior fellow for family studies at Focus, may have had in mind when he said that Christian parents "don't want values taught from simply a sociological construction; they want them rooted in religion."

The important issues

These Focus beliefs, if correct, raise a number of questions:

- Will the parents attracted to The Classical Academy demand that the school teach Christianity as the basis for all virtue, morality and social order? If so, will the school or its teachers comply?
- Will the atmosphere at this charter school cause students with family values from other religions, no religion, or even more liberal Christian denominations to feel unwelcome or ashamed of their family's spiritual values?

Perhaps the most important question is this: If The Classical Academy attracts religious conservatives interested in a school that emphasizes Christianity, what policies or oversight will help keep this charter school from inadvertently overstepping the bounds of appropriate public school activities? CP

Controversy at Palmer High

We Support the Status Quo

Once again, gay issues are making headlines. This time it's the Palmer High student newspaper *The Lever*. Their October 24 issue included a feature article on gay and lesbian students at Palmer High.

Straightforward and personal, it was the kind of article that has earned the Palmer High newspaper numerous awards over the years. But this is Colorado Springs, home of Amendment 2, where the words "gay" and "lesbian" (and even "rainbow") are fighting words.

Perkins reacts

It didn't take long for the first shots to be fired.

Many in the Colorado for Family Values crowd believe that talking about gays and lesbians (other than condemning them) is "promoting homosexuality." So it was no surprise when CFV President Will Perkins protested the Palmer High article. After all, here were the youth of his own community, unwittingly promoting what in Perkins' eyes is the "gay agenda."

Perkins' protests did raise the visibility of the school article. Once again, Col-

orado Springs made headlines around the state as the center for controversy over gay issues.

Students at Palmer High were surprised. It's common knowledge that Palmer High has gay and lesbian students and that they experience difficulty finding acceptance. "All this fuss just because our paper said it?" exclaimed one student.

Community support

The newspaper article was the topic at the next School Board meeting, which lasted past midnight. Support for the student editors and their right to publish the article was overwhelming. Of the more than 50 people

who got up to speak, only five spoke in opposition. Surprisingly, Will Perkins was a no-show.

Citizens Project Board member Jody Alyn spoke in support of the right of Palmer's newspaper to print the article.

New guidelines?

Now, the District 11 school board is considering whether to tighten control

over its student publications. The present guidelines, which comply with Colorado law, give students the greatest amount of freedom to decide what stories should appear in their newspaper.

The Board, however, may decide to limit students' discretion on what is appropriate to publish.

One proposal before the Board would give schools the power to "consider the emotional maturity of the intended audience" and then to exercise "editorial discretion" on stories that might "advocate drug, alcohol or tobacco use, irresponsible sex, or conduct otherwise inconsistent with the shared values of a civilized social order ..."

If adopted, this broad wording would give school officials nearly unlimited power and control, which they could use

to eliminate any newspaper articles they might imagine could offend someone in the community.

Not that these proposed guidelines would always make a difference. As one wag suggested, if the new guidelines are

adopted, one of the few areas safe from school censorship might be a series of articles on "responsible" sex.

Let's encourage the Board to stand up for the principle of free speech.

Our recommendation

Citizens Project recommends that the District 11 School Board stick with its current publications policy which protects the students' rights of free speech. We urge District 11 parents to call the school board (at 520-2004 or 520-2199) to express support of the District's present policy on student publications.

Good leadership means standing up for important principles. Let's encourage the Board to stand up for the principle of free speech for students and student publications. **CP**

"All this fuss just because our paper said it?" exclaimed one student.

The View From Ireland

by Megan Day, CP Director

In light of the upcoming holiday season when many of us will spend time with loved ones and perhaps grapple with differences in traditions and beliefs, I would like to share the following story.

I was recently talking with Brigid Kennedy, a long-time Citizens Project volunteer, about her trip to Ireland from which she had just returned. We spoke of picking blackberries by the side of winding country roads, the difficulties of driving on the opposite side of the street, and we spoke of Northern Ireland and its endless religious war.

Brigid described Derry, a city on the "border" of Northern and Southern Ireland, where there is a wall. The wall divides two worlds, providing a physical barrier between Catholics and Protestants.

When she visited this town, plans were underway to mark the historic day

when Britain gave Catholics certain land rights. A Protestant group was planning a march along one side of the wall through Catholic neighborhoods in protest. Catholics planned to march along the other side of the wall protesting the Protestant intrusion into their neighborhood.

Armed British intervention forces then decided to march between the Catholics and Protestants to "keep the peace." Regardless of the final plan, the potential for Catholics and Protestants alike to turn violent, in accordance with the long-standing tradition of hatred and revenge, was high.

As I pictured the wall in Derry, I was reminded of the *Gazette Telegraph's* recent editorial on school vouchers. It advocated "school choice" in light of the controversy in Jefferson County over the teaching of evolution. Allowing

school choice, it argued, would help us avoid "prickly" subjects such as the evolution/creationism debate, as parents with different beliefs could send their children to different schools.

In this editorial, I saw us building a wall of our own.

Segregation comes in more than one form. Having tackled the challenge of racial segregation in our schools (with still a long way to go), we should not begin a second wave of school segregation along ideological barriers.

Perhaps I am extrapolating too far, but as Brigid and I spoke, I imagined a wall, be it figurative or literal, with people marching on either side, tensions running high, and violence a distinct possibility. All this because we had forgotten how to live with one another, to grapple with those "prickly" differences through dialogue, debate, even protest-

ing and arguing – but without erecting a wall and segregating ourselves.

This is the nature of pluralism: preserving a nation where citizens with different religious and political beliefs, racial and ethnic backgrounds, ages, and abilities can co-exist. Public schools are perhaps the most important arena where citizens interact, despite their different backgrounds.

Tailoring schools to different world views, on the other hand, could lead to balkanized communities, divided along walls between races, religions, political persuasions – the list could be endless. And, as Northern Ireland's history reveals, once constructed, the walls we build between ourselves can lead to centuries of bloodshed and conflict. **CP**

Inside CP

Tree of the Village

Join hands with Citizens Project to celebrate diversity in this season of many holidays by helping to decorate our "Tree of the Village." This, our third annual tree at the Fine Arts Center's Gallery of Trees and Lights, will be an olive tree festooned with "hand" ornaments decorated by CP members and friends.

We will send every CP member a "hand" to decorate, along with our personal invitation to join your hand with ours. Non-members are joyfully invited to help as well—just give us a call at 520-9899, and we'll send you an ornament.

Our tree will be on display at the Fine Arts Center (30 West Dale) December 5 through January 1. Stop by to see it!

Become a CP member

Say "yes" to making a difference in our community. Join Citizens Project!

We've started our second annual Membership Drive. Even with our 1,200 members, we still need your help. We have projects on the drawing board that you can help make into reality.

As you can see from this newsletter, there's a lot going on. We depend on our members: more than 95% of our funding comes from individuals like yourself. If you are not already a member, please help support our work. Simply fill out the membership form on this page and return it to CP.

We want to hear from you. Give us a call at 520-9899 if you have questions.

CP in the news

The October issue of *Ms. Magazine* noted that Citizens Project is one of five organizations across the country countering the religious right.

Klanwatch: When the KKK made a literature drop in Colorado Springs in October, Citizens Project helped research and coordinate coverage of the story, which appeared on KKTV.

Free speech: CP Board member Jody Alyn spoke in defense of freedom of speech at the District 11 School Board meeting about the Palmer High School student newspaper article on gay and lesbian students. CP Director Megan Day also discussed this issue as a guest on the KKTV noon show.

Resource sharing: The *Gazette Telegraph* used CP as a resource for its story on talk show host Chuck Baker's career at KVOR. Chuck Baker quit at KVOR, but has subsequently found employment on another radio station. Citizens Project provided information about the Amendment 17 campaign and election results to the *Washington Post* newspaper and *Church and State* magazine in Washington, D.C.. The Denver weekly *Westword* contacted CP for help with a story about Focus on the Family. **CP**

Mike Miles also authored a Forum article on the District 11 controversy that appeared in the November 18 *Gazette Telegraph*. **CP**

WWW Addresses

More and more information is available via the World Wide Web, accessible through your computer and modem. Here are some Internet addresses with differing perspectives on the issue of church-state separation:

Generally supportive:

American Civil Liberties Union: www.aclu.org

Americans United for Separation of Church and State: www.netplexgroup.com/americansunited/

Anti-Defamation League: www.adl.org

Institute for First Amendment Studies: www.berkshire.net/~ifas/

National Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty (PEARL): www.tiac.net/users/doyle/PEARL.html

Separation of Church and State: www.louisville.edu/~tnpete01/church/index.htm

Less supportive:

Christian Coalition: <http://cc.org>

Colorado Christian Coalition: www.ccco.org/

Family Research Council: www.townhall.com/townhall/FRC/welcome.html.cgi

Focus on the Family:
In the religion section of America OnLine

Rocky Mountain Family Council: www.rmfc.org

Rutherford Institute: www.rutherford.org/

Our Sixth Year

This newsletter marks the beginning of the sixth year for Citizens Project. We've seen (and participated in) a lot over the last five years. Here are some of the highlights:

In 1992, it was the school voucher amendment (voted down 2-1) and Amendment 2. Then in 1994, it was Amendment 16, which would limit free speech in Colorado. Result: voted down.

This year it was Amendment 17, the Parental Rights Amendment. Despite \$400,000 from the Virginia organization Of The People, the "people" voted it down.

Looking ahead

What will the future bring? Well, school vouchers is a perennial issue. It's now been four years since we rejected school vouchers, and that's a long time in political terms. The issue of religion in charter schools is gaining visibility, here and elsewhere in Colorado.

And the creation-evolution controversy is always bubbling close to the surface, as last week's District 20 charter school clash showed.

Where's the action?

Taking contentious social issues to a direct vote by the people has failed time and again in Colorado. Now, look for a change in tactics as conservatives push to get our state legislators to pass what the people have already rejected at the polls.

Look for our Colorado Springs legislators to be at the forefront. **CP**

Our Mission: Citizens Project is a grassroots organization in the Pikes Peak region dedicated to upholding the traditional American values of pluralism, freedom of religion and separation of church and state.



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Human Relations Corner

The Pikes Peak Human Relations Coalition took an activist position in favor of children's rights by opposing Amendment 17, the so-called "Parental Rights Amendment." The HRC was a member of the Protect Our Children Coalition, which spearheaded the successful campaign to defeat the Amendment.

HRC Vice-Chair Mike Miles spoke on behalf of the HRC Board November 6 at the District 11

School Board meeting. He eloquently defended the First Amendment rights of the Palmer High student newspaper to print an article about gay and lesbian students. The HRC remains involved in discussions with the District 11 Board about this important issue.

Mike Miles also authored a Forum article on the District 11 controversy that appeared in the November 18 *Gazette Telegraph*. **CP**

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